WICKED BOWERY GOOD AGAIN IN TIME'S WHIRLIGIG

Once a Byword the World Over, Famous and Infamous Thoroughfare Has Changed Again and Holds Merit in Men's Eyes as It Did When Laid Out in Piet Stuyvesant's Day---Local Color That Illumined Its Sinful Years Recalled

By EDWIN C. HILL.

WHAT a way old Pop Time has of restoring the balance of things! He's as fond of a teeter-totter as a kid. Up and down, up and down—that pleasures the old person. He achieves in cycles, and his cycles are never closed. Human beings, trees, animal life—what you will—develop, decay, develop, by some sort of mysterious but mathematically regular rule and rote, topside becoming downside if only one waits long enough. A good many saws, some with sharp teeth, some with dull, have been hammered out of this phenomenon since mankind began to pretend they were sapient.

Take the Bowery. If any footpath that has ever been trodden by humans of any color had a lurider name only a few years ago than the old Bowery I want to know about it. It stood for battles, murder and sudden death. It stood for rum and ruin, for sickness and soddenness, for poverty and that black despair that comes upon men who have gnawed the bitter fruit of failure.

Its heralded name meant vice all around the world, in every port that rolling, rollicking sailormen downed strong liquors and regretted they were not back where stronger could be had. Among the streets of the earth it was the veriest drab, the *Doll Tearsheet* of streets. It had the repute of a common trull. Not even the Barbary Coast or San Francisco had as poor a name in the mouths of decent men. This, of course, was well on to twenty years ago, scarcely less, for the transmogrification of the Bowery has been no sudden and hasty affair.

Began Life Most Respectably As a Feudal Dutch Hamlet

But you know—or do you?—that the best known (save two) thoroughfares in all New York began life in such respectability as few streets or even alleys can boast? The origin of the Bowery was a Dutch farmhouse, none other than Piet Stuyvesant's, which logically expanded into a sort of feudal hamlet. It was respectability utterly Dutch, than which there is no more complete respectability in this sinful world. It was sylvan respectability. Songbirds twittered within it. Flowers (in the old Dutch fashion) grew upon its proper borders. Prim maids in edged aprons and wooden shoes raised blue eyes among its straggling paths. Ponderous householders pointed church wardens toward the then visible horizon and drifted little fleecy clouds toward the blue for which the sky of Manhattan later became famous.

This, mind you, was the Bowery, the Great Bouwerie, as they called it then in the Dutch record books, and no locality in the world was sweeter, cleaner, decenter. It was, indeed, a kind of paradise, as close to imaginable habitational perfection as Nieuw Amsterdam and all that grew out of Nieuw Amsterdam ever knew.

Skip two hundred years, which you may be sure Old Man Time did not do, and we have a very different Bowery from the placid, ordered, fragrant community of the retainers of Stuyvesant. The Evil One has entered this paradise and his works are all around. Rollicking pleasure, flowing rum, swaggering men from all the seven seas, adventurers of hawk noses and bright black eyes, not a few of whom knew the feel of a pirate's deck under their bootheels; loose women flashing provocative glances at the riffraff of half a world, boorish cattle drovers stupidly lushing at the noisy inns—what a change!

Add fifty years to time's score and the picture is eviller and less attractive, wickeder and less picturesque. For the life of the Bowery has become in two centuries and a half a pestilential thing, a thing so rank in its ugliness as to invite catastrophic punishment from on high. Gomorrah was sinless compared to the Bowery of the late nineteenth century.

Then again the wheel rolls, although only the small space of the periphery between two spokes—ten or a dozen years, say twenty to go it large. And we have what? The Bowery again respectable, almost stodgily respectable, for it is a Bowery devoid of liquor dens, devoid of dark and bloody lures for the golden half wits, empty of scarlet pretence, deprived of that ranting blare that makes the night eager for twisted souls. Time has played teeter-totter in his deliberate, unhurried way. Goodness knows, the picture is changed enough, but the effect is the same.

Gone are the pleasant Dutch farms, the winding, flagstoned walks, the gardens of old fashioned flowers, the blue eyed Dutch maidens, the wide grassy spaces, the visible horizon, the sylvan beauty and peace. But returned is the orderliness and calm decency of those long gone days.

The effect is the same. Topside is downside again. The old Bowery has entered another cycle, to last no man knows how long. Who dare say it may not be wicked again some day; may not return to its swearing, tippling, bloody ways? Lest the men of real estate that are so painfully intent upon maintaining solid repute for the ancient highway take alarm, one may suggest that there seems little likelihood of such a turn of the wheel. The Bowery is apt to keep its seat on the mourners' bench. Having got religion, it is scarcely apt to backslide. Still, one never knows when one is dealing in a large way with the strange old fellow Time.

For those who are fond of the curiosities of their own city it is not dull to trace a little of the tale of the Bowery. To begin with—one will be brief—it was a very ancient Indian trail, a narrow path beaten inches into the scanty topsoil by the feet of countless red men. It was part of the long trail that ran all the way from the southern end of the island clear to Spuyten Duyvil—all the way to Albany, in fact, where it hooked on to the great east and west trail of the Iroquois.

It was a cowpath for the Dutch settlers, and it led to the Vlache, now City Hall Park. When Gov. Stuyvesant secured his Great Bouwerie and erected his house just west of the present St. Mark's Church he widened the cowpath from the Vlache to the path leading to his house, and this was the real beginning of the Bowery as a public thoroughfare. His Bowery originally extended from Chatham square to a creek, afterward called Sunfish Creek, which ran from a pond at about Fourth avenue and Thirty-third street to the foot of East Twenty-fifth street.

The lane, which was called Bouwerie Pathje, was cut through in 1652. A century or so later it became Bowery lane. All around it were the holdings of the families who were to give their names to the streets of New York—the Delanceys, the Pells, the Bayards and others. A set of books could be written about the Bowery, yet it never had a corporate existence like the village of Harlem. It had no fixed limits like Greenwich Village. It began as a settlement of the employees of Gov. Stuyvesant, and, like Topsy, it just "growed."

First Saloon Was Bowery Inn, And Site Always Held One

If you care to know where the first saloon of the old Bowery (not the present much shorter avenue) stood, it was at Fourth avenue and Fourteenth street, where John Clapp's Bowery Village Inn was first erected and where until the coming of prohibition a saloon invariably held the corner. It was the last stopping place before entering the city of the Boston stage coach, which began making monthly trips in 1700, and it was a regular stopping place for the Boston coach until the route via boat to Providence and rail to Boston cut down the time from forty-one hours to twenty-four hours.

In 1832 the first street car line began running in the Bowery, old village lines had been wiped out, streets had been cut through and a complete change had come over the scene.

The story of the Bowery as a street of pleasure begins with the opening of Sperry's Botanical Gardens in 1752. One of the show places of the old city, it covered the two blocks between Fourth street and Astor place and between Broadway and the Bowery. In 1803 it was renamed Vauxhall Gardens, which remained for many years the most popular place in the city. There still exists a relic of the old place, a house in the middle of the block just south of the Smith, Gray Building.

Of theatre sites there are several quite famous ones. Where the Thalia Theatre now stands the Bull's Head Tavern entertained the town loungers in the middle of the eighteenth century. The present Thalia Theatre is the fifth theatre building on this site, fire having destroyed the others. Opposite the old Bowery, now the entrance to the Manhattan Bridge, is one of the most interesting theatrical sites in America. The Bowery Amphitheatre stood here nearly a century ago and then became a circus where Tony Pastor appeared as a clown. Then it became successively the German Stadt Theatre and the German Volks Garten, a famous pleasure resort, seating 3,000 or more. It became the Windsor Theatre in 1879, burnt down in 1883 and was finally demolished to make way for the bridge.

The People's Theatre occupied a famous site. In 1865 it was Tony Pastor's Opera House and in 1871 it was Aberle's Volks Garten. The Germans were strong along the Bowery in those old days. They left in the early eighties, most of them, because a vicious element was creeping in, the element that made the name of the Bowery an ugly byword. The two variety theatres, the most of the theatres in fact, have utterly changed character now.

Leisurely Stroll Will Reveal The Many Changes Recently

It is difficult to appreciate what changes have come to the Bowery within a decade or a decade and a half unless one leisurely paces the wide roadway—one of the widest in all the city—that runs between Chatham square and Cooper square. The saloons have disappeared, of course, and with them has disappeared much of the "color" of the thoroughfare, an ugly color, but color nevertheless.

Gone are The Bucket of Blood, Suicide Hall, Nigger Mike Callahan's, the Flea Bag, Gumbossy's and a score or more of lethal dives where murder was the nightly diversion and no waiter inexpert in the use of chloral drops could hold a job twenty-four hours.

Gone are the picturesque, sometimes extraordinary characters that once made the peculiar annals of the street—Schuyler Van Ness, once a gentleman of fashion, then a derelict in this Sargasso Sea; Dan the Fiddler, a long haired Irishman with some skill upon the violin and a wheedling tongue; Bat Sweeney, Billy McGlory, McGurk, the notorious; Sloppy Mag McUnskey, Tin Can Cushman, Steve Brodie, Chuck Connors—so many, indeed, that the list is impossible of reproduction; some with reporter-made reputations, others quaintly deserving of their queer repute.

Gone are the colorful politicians of those days of twenty years ago, the clan of Sullivan having fallen upon thin days, Florrie and Big Tim dead and gone and Little Tim too, Larry Mulligan passed out, the whole group broken up, scattered, powder blown into the air.

Gone are the famous eating houses, Mike Lyons's for one, the places that never knew the use of a front door key and where good solid food was served for prices that fitted the necessities of patrons. Mike Lyons, by the way, lives to this day and may be found for the seeking at his home in Brooklyn, hale and hearty at something over 80 years.

The One Mile House, a Bowery landmark for 100 years, closed in 1921, fallen before the progressiveness and business demand that swept out of existence and even out of mind such famous resorts as the Atlantic Garden, Germania Hall, Brodie's, Pat Farley's, Mike Lyons's and the Howard Cooper Hotel. Books might be written about these departed individuals and departed institutions, but is it worth while? Who cares for the past, a dead thing, after all. The present is what rings the bell of interest.

Until recently a nationwide renowned slum, the Bowery has emerged if not in its old time Dutch glory at least as a respectable, reputable and creditable downtown business street. Its rejuvenation was not due to prohibition, however earnestly some moralists may desire that to have been so. It was due to a variety of causes, mostly strictly business, sheerly economic.

The resurgence of the Bowery followed close upon its intersection by the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridge Plazas. The great volume of traffic that rolls daily across these vast spans made the hitherto shunned Bowery a very desirable location for many kinds of business. Merchants that never would have dreamed of seeking stores on the old Bowery with its drunken and disordered stream of human beings, penniless or with no money to waste on sensible offerings, at once sought places on the reformed Bowery where there were coming every day many thousands of respectable folk with money in their pockets to spend on worthwhile articles.

Then followed the removal of the elevated railroad pillars from their position of encroachment upon sidewalks. In the dark days of the Bowery history the elevated had shut off light from blocks of shops or rooms that otherwise would have made desirable shops. When the elevated road was moved to the centre of the roadway a flood of light was let into these buildings and they became desirable and rentable.

The Bowery was reformed in spite of itself. Its onetime sordid and vicious habitues disappeared or sank into unadvertised obscurity. With traffic pouring into the great, broad street, there ensued a remarkable transformation. Where the saloon, the dive, the gambling house and the gunman's hangout had flourished; where nickel theatres, freak shows, fake curiosity exhibitions, many of them covers for thieves, had prospered; where second hand clothing shops and grimy pawnshops; where resorts for thieves and the like of thieves had lined the avenue, there now stand banks and substantial shops, clothing houses, stationery stores, jewelry and shoe and crockery stores and headquarters for many considerable wholesale businesses.

The advent of prohibition helped to get rid of the dives more quickly than otherwise would have been possible. Real estate values have gone up smartly. The Bowery has had a boom all of its own. Rentals are much higher than they used to be in the old sad, bad days. It is a queer turn of the wheel to any one who knew the street well even fifteen years ago.

There is no church along the Bowery, never has been for some reason, although one would have thought that of all places in New York where churches should have sprouted the Bowery was the most likely, the need for religious guidance being so much greater. But this is balanced nowadays by the fact that a policeman is rather hard to find, unless one excepts the traffic men. There are plenty of them. There have to be along the Bowery of 1921, the regenerated Bowery. Of the other sort, the sort that used to walk with ready club and ready pistol, taking the middle of the street and avoiding the danger of the house wall, there are not many around even at night.

Truly is the Bowery grown good!

Early night is still a first rate time to stroll in this ancient highway. The four principal theatres, two Jewish and two Italian, are going strong, and there is still much of interest to the observant eye, the seeing eye.

What Would Peter Cooper Say Were He to View It Again?

There is always Chinatown—not the utterly non-existent Chinatown of the tourist's imagination and the ballyhoo's split tongue, but a very engrossing little colony withal, a colony of quaint shops, a different and refreshing quarter of the city for one slightly weary of the commonplaces of white men's roadways. Sunday is its throbbing day, for on a Sunday Chinese flow in from the whole metropolitan district. They used to come to gamble—do still doubtless—but for whatever reason they come the Sons of Ham fancy Sunday. But the Chinese are not the only outlanders of the Bowery, and one whose interest seeks the faces and the behavior of the drifters of the earth will find them along that street.

One wonders what Peter Cooper would think of the Bowery could that honest soul look upon it again—in the flesh, one means. It was different enough in his day, in the years before he set down at its northernmost limit the institute that has done so much for its regeneration. He used in his old age to come out and sit in a little park and read, sometimes bringing his little grandson with him.

Old Peter would take out of his pocket a rubber cushion and get several small boys to see which could blow the hardest. Then he would lay the inflated ring upon the bench seat and sit upon it and think or doze or read.

How the old man would stare if from that bench he could now look down the Bowery upon the massed traffic surging between the precipices of decent, honest buildings!

Germany's Birth Rate Falling Despite Increase in Marriages

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THE fall in the birth rate already evident before the war in Germany, as in most other highly developed countries, still continues, despite a remarkable increase in post-war marriages. Although the German pre-war birth rate never fell so low as to approach the death rate, as in France, the whole question at present, because of post-war economic and labor problems, has taken on a new significance, especially in view of the proposed legislation looking toward what for all practical purposes is a partial birth control.

In 1876 the German birth rate reached its highest point, and in that year 240.3 children were born to every 1,000 married women in Berlin. But from then on began a steady decline, until in 1913 the average per 1,000 was only one-third the 1876 figure. This is an extreme instance, but it represents a general tendency all over Germany, even in the country districts. Despite the advance of medical science which brought an increase in average longevity, and the decrease of emigration in 1907, the number of boys 15 to 16 years old in 1907 was showing a slow but steady decrease with relation to the total population. Of course the war caused a still further fall in the rate, but the naturally expected recovery as normal circumstances returned brought about an increase of 90 per cent. in 1920 over the 1917 figures. Still even this total was appreciably lower than in 1913.

The natural question is: What is the probable cause of this alarming tendency? Is it a deterioration in national health and an accompanying decrease in reproductive power, or is it deliberate choice?

These questions have so far no solution, and even the recent birth rate congress at Cologne produced no satisfactory answers. On the other hand the Social Democrats have brought forward two proposals in the Reichstag proposing radical amendments to the law on abortion which seek to make artificial control of the conception legal and may accentuate the decline.

Several hundred prosecutions for abortion take place annually, but this total, as compared with the number of actual cases that go unpunished, is insignificant, as the figures of death in childhood show. For instance, in Berlin half these deaths are due to abortion.

Basing their contention on the theory that such conditions only make the law ridiculous and work serious harm to the community by inequality of application the Socialists want to make abortion legal when it is performed with the consent of the expectant mother or that of a duly registered physician, provided it takes place within the first three months of pregnancy.

The Independent Social Democrats go still farther and wish to strike out whole sections of the criminal code.

Changes in Forest Growth Show Soft Woods Are Replacing Hard

IT has been remarked by many authorities on forestry that when one species of trees has been removed its place is regularly taken by trees of another kind. Those who delight in forest landscape cannot fail to observe the same change. This is accounted for by some on the supposition that the soil has become impoverished of elements that supported the original growth, and that it is no longer suited to the further production of such forests. This theory is in but small part true. In almost every instance a forest covered soil is being increased and enriched for the continuance of whatever growth is at any time upon it. The change of species is owing to change in conditions.

Everywhere in the Northern States, where a mixed growth of hard wood and of soft wood was native to the soil, the change has been all in one direction. The hard wood has given way to the soft. Persons who have observed with any thought the appearance of New England landscapes for fifty years or more are well aware that the hills are now wearing darker robes than they were when the now old men were boys.

The same thing has been observed in England. The Scotch fir has become so plentiful since its introduction in 1776 that one can hardly imagine such rapid and extensive propagation on the part of a forest tree.

Everywhere the change is in the same direction, from the deciduous trees to the evergreen; that is, from those of the falling leaf to those that keep their verdure all the year round.

This results from the practice of pasturing woodlands to domestic cattle. These animals eat greedily every young beech and maple that they can find. They have no relish for the young fir and spruce trees, with their dry and prickly foliage. Then, again, the resins secreted by the evergreens seem to be unpalatable to all animals except sheep and deer. These will browse upon even the pitch pine under stress of hunger, when snow is deep on the ground.

In a state of nature, or under the husbandry of the savages, a certain balance of power was maintained among forest trees. The squirrels ate the beechnuts, acorns and spruce seeds with seemingly equal zest. They made return for their requisitions upon the beeches and oaks by burying at intervals the nuts and acorns. None of the seeds of evergreens needed any such planting. They are all of them light, and are furnished with wings, so that the wind that shakes them from the cone carries them sometimes for miles. Wherever they happen to alight upon the soil they germinate and take root. They need no covering.

In the New Forest of England the tenant population has enjoyed right of "pannage," that is, of pasturing pigs in the woods. These animals eat all the nuts and acorns they can find, and very few seeds escape them.